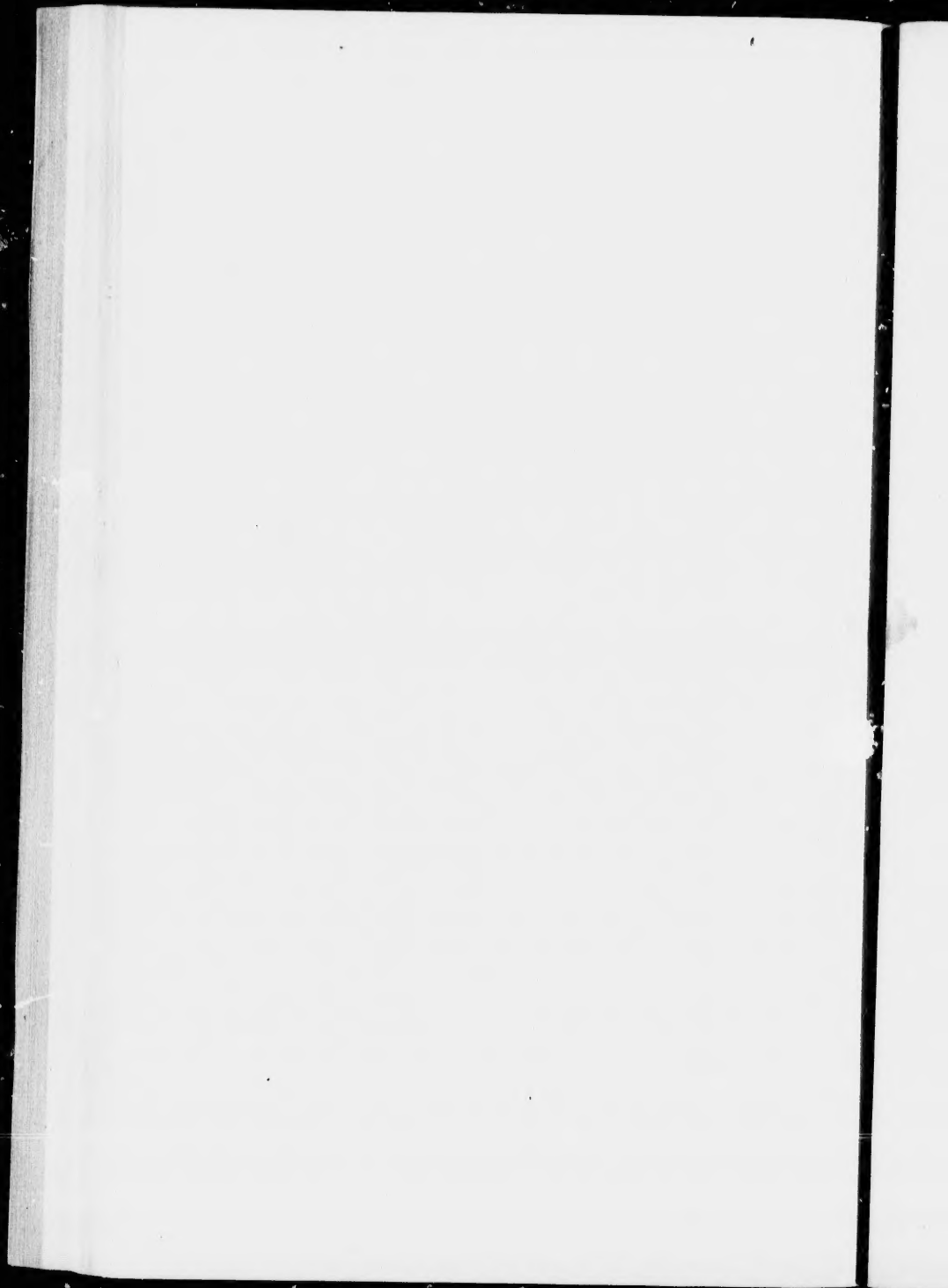




THE

SAGUENAY:

*Russell Doremus
from the North*

AN UNPUBLISHED POEM.



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CONTENTS.

The ship remains at anchor during the night, in the St. Lawrence, opposite to the Saguenay.—The dawn.—The vessel weighs anchor, and sails towards the mouth of the great river.—Sunrise.—The entrance into the Saguenay.—The Indian hunter of a former day.—Advance up the stream described.—Island of St. Louis.—Cape Eternity.—Cape Trinity.—Tradition of the Hunted Deer.—The Thunder Storm.—Story of the Maniac Bride.—Reflections on the appearance of the River.—Its shores and scenery.—The Hermit, an old tradition.—Sunset on the Saguenay.—Conclusion.

I.

On the St. Lawrence' tide we lay,
Awaiting there the promised day.
Upon her course our vessel steers,
So soon as break of dawn appears.
The golden light, at length, comes forth,
And wakes to life the sleeping earth.
The anchor's raised, our sail is spread,
And Cyclop shores now loom a-head.

Dark Saguenay, tho' widely famed,
With wonder, awe, still thou art named !
All on the deck expectant stand,
As we approach the mystic land
Of mountain heights, untrodden o'er,
With sluggish surge from shore to shore :
So vast, profound, that every fleet
Which bears a flag o'er ocean's wave,
Might, in proud wrath, each other greet,
And find below a watery grave.

II.

Upon the sullen waters, deep and dark,
All sail unfurled, safe glides our trusty bark.
The early breeze, awakening with the morn,
Now wafts us slowly o'er those depths forlorn :
Mysterious realm, where, towering to the skies,
The storm-worn cliffs of Saguenay arise.
Sweet dawn is past, and from his orient throne,
The glorious sun darts light o'er every zone :
Far on the eastern hills his living ray,
Glows with effulgence of the rising day.
Wild vapoury clouds, that veil the mighty stream,
Sweep the abyss, lit by the morning beam.

Within we pass, we enter that weird land,
Where all is traced by an Almighty hand.
We sail 'mid silence, solitudes serene,
And view with awe, the dread, the matchless scene ;
That dim abode of sadness and repose,
Like ruined home of long-forgotten woes ;
So still, so lost, it seems to the wrapt mind,
That here we leave the living world behind.
Our course now lies 'mid scenes of death and gloom,
Where cold oblivion shrouds a voiceless doom.

High o'er that solemn, lifeless, wasted land,
Branchless and blighted, the dark mountains stand,
Save where on lesser heights the stunted pine,
In the cleft rocks their hardy roots entwine.
Black, sterile hills in precipices soar,
Like granite walls along that blasted shore :
While from on high, the deep and stream-worn dell,
Cleaves the abrupt down to that tide of Hell ;
Where waters darker than the Stygian wave,
Flow o'er the sleep of Nature's earliest grave :
Livid, unfathom'd in their iron bed,
Silent and cold, as river of the dead.
A hundred miles, descending from its source,
Continuous Alps o'ershadow its long course :

On every side, walled rocks and barren forms,
Pinnacled afar, like genii of storms,
Bar path and egress from that pool profound,
Where all is surge, black gulphs, and crags around.
From dizzy heights, which oft the view appal,
In feath'ry foam descends the waterfall,
Swoln by tempests, which so fiercely rise,
With sudden fury, in those doom-lit skies.

III.

There oft before, when dawn would break,
And day and night their farewell take,
The homeless Indian with canoe,
In times long gone, 'neath skies as blue,
Would silently his course pursue.
Far up the river's dark expanse,
His graceful bark would swiftly glance.
His tomahawk, his scalping-knife,
So promptly used in scenes of strife ;
His frail canoe, his dog and gun,
His only wealth since life begun.—
By lonely shores he calmly glides,
And stems the current's waveless tides.
Inland he tends to wilds afar,

Which lie beneath the western star ;
Where forests hoar and prairies vast,
By Indian trod thro' ages past,
Invite his footsteps, haunt his mind,
With hopes of all he there may find.
Twilight descends, he skims the deep,
Dark shadowed waters near the steep.
With eager look is fixed his eye,
Now far ahead, and then on high :
For his young squaw and Indian brood,
He seeks some spot where shade or wood,
A shelter thro' the night may yield,
And from the storm their sleep may shield.
The smoke, slow rising near the deep,
Marks where the fearless wanderers sleep ;
Beneath the stars of summer night,
Which on them shed their holiest light.
The morrow comes, still on they go,
Where brighter suns of autumn glow,
And waters softer, sweeter flow.
Chicoutimi they soon will reach,
And there encamp on winding beach.
Ere long the lake which feeds that stream,
All glowing in the evening beam,

'Neath splendors of the golden sky,
Meet his enraptured, eager eye.
That bright, blue sea, once traversed o'er,
His wigwam rests on wilder shore.
To hunter's hopes and instincts true,
Soon burst upon his piercing view,
The mighty regions further on,
Than the great lake, now named St. John :
There oft the bounding buffalo bleeds,
From gleaming arms, and daring deeds.

IV.

Onward we pass, and round we gaze the while,
Borne on the waves which lave St. Louis, isle ;
A lonely spot, high towering o'er the deep,
Upon whose heights, a thousand ages sleep.
But farther on, still loftier scenes appear,
And to the clouds the capes their summits rear ;
Vast, dim, abrupt, and pinnacled in air,
Like thrones of Eblis fixed for ever there.
Here Cape Eternity's immortal height
Echoes the thunder thro' the realms of night.
Giants, perchance, in long oblivion lost,
Have left these records of their mighty past ;

Lone, silent ruins, time will not efface,
Sépulchral shrines of Earth's Titanic race.
Our stately bark like water-fowl (no more)
Floats on the depths near to that dismal shore.
Then on the view, to sad and wond'ring eyes,
And upward rising to the cloudless skies,
Bursts a wild grandeur which o'erawes the mind,
And leaves all temples of man's hands behind.
Three soaring cliffs, dark hanging o'er the stream,
And named earth's emblem of the One Supreme,
O'erwhelming stand, stupendous and sublime,
Eiries of storms, and relics of all time.
Caverns and yawning caves, and dells profound,
Haunts unexplored, those awful domes surround.
Oft the wild tenant of some distant vale,
Ascends those heights, when summer suns prevail;
And from the brink, where sleeps the evening beam,
Looks calmly down upon the Stygian stream;
To those dark waters which unfathomed flow,
More than fifteen hundred feet below.

V.

'Tis said that many a year ago,
'Mid lonely wilds and wastes of snow,
A hunter, come from home afar,
The track pursued of browsing deer.
The startled stag fled on his way,
Thro' dreary length of winter's day.
Thick ice was frozen o'er the floods,
And snows lay deep in pathless woods :
The sun's cold light shone pale on high,
From azure vault of noonday sky ;
The solemn stillness of the air,
Was scarce by echo ruffled there,
Save as the hunter and the deer,
Swept thro' the forest wild and drear.
The earth seem'd dead, or had grown old,
All nature was so calm and cold.
Away, away, still bounding on,
Far in his flight the deer hath gone.—
By his light snow-shoe, well upborne,
The hunter's strength is still unworn :
Slow on the wearied stag he gains,
Which still his onward course maintains.

Of Trinity, in headlong flight,
He reached at length the dizzy height ;
Then rushing frenzied, deep in snow,
He plunges to the depths below ;
Down, down in wild affright, despair,
Upon the icy, iron glare ;
There, crushed in pieces, cold he lay :—
The hunter came, then went his way.

VI.

But pause not here, nor linger thus too long,
Far other scene must soon engage our song.
The Capes recede, we still ascend the stream,
Which lies like mirror in the sultry beam.
The gentle breeze then sudden died away,
And on the flood becalmed our vessel lay.
A solemn hour, when memory sways the heart,
And each to each doth deeper thoughts impart.
Bright hope is there, brief revel of our youth,
Which woos our dreams, till we awake to truth ;
While age serene still mingles with the throng,
And so the day goes thoughtfully along.
But, hark ! there comes, resounding from afar
A hollow roar of elemental war.

The summer sun and glowing skies are gone,
And rushing winds bear the tornado on.
Clouds charged with tempests, mountain-like in form,
Rise black as Hell, from realms of night and storm.
Onward they roll, and with them through the skies,
The fiery vapour of the lightning flies.
Old earth is still, the hush of doom is there,
And deepening horror broods upon the air :
Flash the quick lightnings, fork'd, livid from on high,
Then bursts the dread artill'ry of the sky :
Crashing, far bounding, down rolling with each shock,
Till the vast mountains on their centres rock :
Dark thunder-thrones, which echo the rebound,
Booming afar 'mong thousand hills around :
Stern echoes answering from each gloomy vale,
Rise on the breeze, then rush upon the gale,
Waking the ruin from eternal sleep,
Thro' hoary palaces along that deep ;
And back, beyond, where'er the bolt is hurl'd,
O'er rocky mountains, and the polar world.—
The floods descend, a deluge from the clouds,
And midnight gloom the mighty gulph enshrouds.
The watery whirlwinds dash upon each shore,
Drowning the echo in the dread uproar.

That realm of storms, dark as abyss profound,
 Is veiled in night for many a league around ;
 And far athwart the clouds upon that stream
 Flashes in wrath the lightning's lurid gleam ;
 Then quick as light, resistless o'er the whole,
 Appalling still the solemn thunder's roll.
 With awe we view the horrors of the scene,
 O'er which, that morn, such sweet repose had been.
 Our gallant ship, the tempest's wrath defies,
 And with all sail, soon seeks serener skies.

VII.

There is a tale, 'tis one of woe,
 A tale of many a year ago,
 Which this wild storm brought back again,
 In memories fading from my brain.

'Twas told to me in long-gone years,
 And then it left sad thoughts behind ;

In sooth I shed some early tears,
 O'er love that lived, so deep enshrined,
 In broken heart, and ruined mind.

'Tis said a youth and his fair bride,
 Were sailing on that sullen tide,
 In a light boat, which spread its sail,

To wand'ring breeze and rising gale.
Few days had passed since they were wed,
And fond the love which blest them yet,
In their young dreams, which scarce had fled,
Before life's summer sun had set.
From parents, friends, and scenes of joy,
With smiles they part, and youthful hope ;
They ne'er had known the world's alloy,
Or ills with which we all must cope.
The heaven was blue, the sun rode high,
There passed no cloud o'er the noonday sky :
The winds were lulled in their calmest sleep,
And waves rose not on the winding deep.
They went not forth that day alone ;
Companions gay, with them had gone.
Each gazed upon the scenes around,
And hours so glad, too brief they found.
But dark and fearful soon arose,
O'er nature's sweet and soft repose,
A storm of thunder, wind, and rain,
From which they refuge sought in vain.
Of their frail bark, the stricken sail,
Bows to the waters 'neath the gale.
The bark, a moment, quivering stood,

Then, overturned, floats on the flood.
All perished there, save that young bride,
Who clung, then climbed the boat's dark side.
Thus borne, upheld, she reached the shore,
With widowed heart, and young no more.
On shelving rock, she safety found,
'Mid rugged cliffs, above, around.
Aloft each crag its summit rears ;
For her no exit thence appears.
In those brief moments, wild despair,
Had blighted life, till then so fair.
Alas ! that lightning stroke of grief,
In madness soon will find relief.
The frail, the subtle links, which make
The chain of reason ere it break,
Were snapped by rude and sudden shock,
Perchance before she gained the rock.

There wailing by the lonely deep,
She calls her loved, her lost from sleep.
His bridal bed 's below the wave,
Nor deems she yet it is his grave.
Her raven hair, dishevelled now,
Hangs loosely round her pallid brow ;
And her dark eye, calm, fixed, forlorn,

Which beamed so bright upon that morn,
Hath lost its ray of joy and light,
Soft lustre-shade of starry night.
At intervals a dull repose,
Benumbs to rest her sleepless woes.
Thus hours fled, dim twilight came,
Her silent look of grief the same.
Then the high stars which gem the night,
Shed o'er that stream their sacred light:
And deep below, each mirrored beam
Shines softly bright in that wild stream;
Which still and cold, when winds had fled,
Flow'd o'er the mourned, the lost, the dead.
The hush of night, in solemn hour,
Dwells on each mighty, mountain shore.
In depths serene of azure sky,
The queen of night is seen on high:
The lonely one beholds that scene,
So changed from all such morn had been.
The barren rock below, her bed;
Unsheltered, too, her lonely rest,
No pillow waits that drooping head,
No sleep to soothe that hapless breast.
One day and night of pale despair,

She pines in grief, and madness there ;
Her wand'ring gaze, her haggard eye,
Too well bespeak her agony ;
While low and mournful o'er the surge,
Went forth, at times, her wailing dirge.

The drifting boat was found below,
Near to a place named *L'Anse à l'Eau*,
Which at the entrance of the stream,
Lies on the right. Tho' small it seem,
That village long for tales oft told,
Was famous in the days of old.
In weary search, with heavy heart,
Intrepid men, the lost had sought,
Along each shore, in every part,
Where dangers past too well had taught.
At length their bark drew near the scene,
Where she, thus wrecked, so long had been.
The spot they gain ; by them descried,
They knew her soon for that young bride.
When first they came, no word she said,
Nor sign of fear, or joy, betrayed :
But when they sought her thence to lead,
She rose with look wild, full of dread ;
And pointed to the wave that flowed,

Beneath the summer sky that glowed.
She told them she still there must bide,
Till he should come with evening tide.
And then they saw that she was mad,
And so had guessed from looks so sad.
She told them calmly where he slept,
And smiled at first, and then she wept.
To her 'twas said these friends had come,
From him she mourned, and loved so well,
To seek, escort her to that home,
Where she with him would safely dwell.
And then she smiled, but, oh! such smile
Of wasted hope! but went the while.
To *L'Anse à l'Eau*, from this dark shore,
That maniac bride, they gently bore.
Then leeches came, despite her will,
To heal a wound beyond their skill.
All now is vain; life fades away,
And her soul darkens day by day.
Nor time, nor change, their lessons teach,
Nor could oblivion's shadows reach
That broken heart, and shattered mind,
By grief and madness left behind.
In visions of the haunted brain,

She wanders o'er the past again.
Oftimes she says, he sleeps below,
Where waters darkly, deeply flow.
And then she dreams he is not dead,
And calls him to her dying bed.
One cruel thought, still blights the heart,
And brings the tear to her dark eye ;
Ne'er from her breast will it depart,
'Tis that he leaves her there to die.
He could not know, can know no more,
That love for her which once he bore.
Sad, gentle memories, all forlorn,
Return, alas ! to that bright morn,
To hope, to love, which now she deems
For ever gone, like vanish'd dreams.
It came, at length, the fatal hour,
When she must pass from life away ;
And then her mind regained its power,
Lit by the light of reason's ray.
'Twas midnight time, so calm and blest ;
By windowed arch and open blind,
Where she had known a long unrest,
On her lone couch she then reclined,
Watching the waning moon arise,

And twinkling stars in dark blue skies ;
With last, long look, and mournful brow,
Upon the night she gazes now.
Her thoughts are with the loved of earth,
And thus she pours her spirit forth :

1.

The stars are low, low in the west,
The moon ascends the midnight sky ;
Come, my beloved, come to thy rest,
Come pray for me before I die.

2.

Come from thy cold, thy oozy bed,
Where death and silence darkly reign ;
On my worn heart lay that loved head,
And, ere I go, I'll soothe each pain.

3.

Come, my loved one, my lamp burns low,
But reason half resumes her sway ;
Come kiss once more this faded brow,
'Twill soon be colder than the clay.

4.

My darkened soul has wandered far,
O'er blighted hopes of our young years;
But madness ne'er my love could mar,
Or dry the fountain of my tears.

5.

Within my heart thy name 's enshrined,
In love too fond for time's decay;
And, 'mid dark, ruined waste of mind,
My deathless love will weep and pray.

6.

Wilt thou not come, my long lost one,
Once more to bless me with thy love?
Wilt thou forget, when I am gone,
To holier, brighter worlds above?

7.

Thou canst not come,—but I will go,
Will seek thee in thy lonely rest;
In heaven above, or earth below;
'Twere better thus than live unblest.

8.

Sweet angel voices, seraph eyes,
 Invite me to celestial home ;
 To them, to thee, my spirit flies ;
 On wings of hope, of love, I come.

A silent watcher heard that strain,
 And softly entered where she lay ;
 She gently spoke—'twas all in vain ;
 That once bright eye had lost its ray.
 The broken heart beat faint and low,
 And hues of death were on her brow.
 Why linger here, this tale prolong ?
 With this her sad, last, broken song,
 Her dying dirge upon that day,
 That stricken soul had passed away :
 In Tadousac, from all her woes,
 She sleeps alone, in long repose.

VIII.

Too long I've wandered from those haunts sublime,
 'Mid old traditions of forgotten time.
 Along those shores, upon that silent flood,
 Grim desolation must forever brood.

The wintry wind, with avalanche of snow,
Falling in thunder to the depths below ;
The vernal breath, the sunshine and the rain,
Sweep o'er those heights, dwell on that tide in vain.
Nor summer fruit, nor flowers of early spring,
Nor joyous bird upon ethereal wing,
A home will find upon the barren height,
Or in lone cave where dwells eternal night.
No piercing eye, nor the proud mind of man,
Will ere these solitudes of nature scan.
There they repose, like wrecks of a lost world,
From chaos sprung, perchance from glory hurl'd.
Did this dim wilderness, this dread abode,
Go forth thus blighted from the hand of God ?
Or did the deluge, in a later time,
Leave on these shores stern monuments of crime ?
When the all-wasting waters ebb'd away,
Did they this realm in sterile ruin lay ?
Or hath the earthquake, in some distant age,
Upheaved the mountains in its fiery rage ?
Rocking the dædal earth to depths profound,
And in its wrath, which shook the heights around,
Cleaving the solid hills ? the shock is heard on high,
Loud as ten thousand thunders in the sky :

Then booms the war of crashing rocks below,
In that abyss where now dark waters flow.
Hath the volcano, in an unknown time,
Laid in wild waste this rude and wondrous clime ?
And did its crater first, and then its grave,
A channel leave for that eternal wave ?
Or hath some other cataclysm past,
In endless woe, this mighty land o'ercast ?
Where now the cold, unfathomed waters sweep,
Perchance the genii of destruction sleep ;—
Beneath those ruins, stern and dim and old,
By time unchanged, their mystery still untold.

IX.

Far traditions have come down,
By ancient men obscurely shown :
But one there is of recent date,
Which briefly here I would relate.
'Tis said that near a dizzy height,
And fearful to the passer's sight,
There stood a lone, mysterious cave,
High o'er that dark, remorseless wave.
In passing there, we yet behold
Some traces of that tale thus told.

An open arch, half up the steep,
Still faces outward on the deep.
Within that haunt, perchance for crime,
A hermit dwelt, in bygone time :
Thro' summer's heat, and winter's storm,
Was seen his bent, his aged form.
For years, they say, the passers by,
Wild wanderers o'er that silent stream,
The lonely man would oft espy,
When the first dawn of day would beam.
Though slight the entrance which it gave,
A path obscure, led from the cave,
Toward dark forests, which appear,
Stretched to the mountains far in rear.
What, whence his food, no one could tell,
Or what that hermit had befel :
The old recluse, no man e'er saw,
Save from the waters far below.
One day some hunters sought him there,
At risk of life, high o'er the wave ;
His bones they found, disposed with care,
With the cold stones for bier and grave.
Within that cell, his relics sleep,
Beside that opening on the deep :

He left no sign, no word, no trace,
From whence he came, or what his race.

X.

Enthroned in glories of the dying day,
The setting sun still lingers on his way.
Effulgent orb, far sinking to his rest,
Low o'er the boundless regions of the west,
What heavenly light hath blazed around that sun,
In that high world, thro' which his course hath run!
His rays illumine where tropic summer glows,
And bear his radiance to the polar snows.
Now from the hills his golden beams decline,
Where mystic clouds their matchless hues combine.
Relucent waves of undulating light,
Lave sapphire thrones, all splendor to the sight.
Yet, Saguenay, thy cold, dark waters flow,
Silent, unfathomed, 'mong the rocks below;
And evening sunlight, blazing o'er the deep,
Will reach no depths, where thy dread mysteries sleep.
On the vast cliffs, which gird thy sullen shores,
The mighty orb a flood of glory pours;
And every beam, descending from on high,
Reflects below the halos of the sky.

So on thy heights, and long thro' ages gone,
The golden day-beams of that sun have shone :
And o'er thy solitudes, thro' future time,
Will light the summits of thy scenes sublime.
But suns will shine, and heat will glow in vain,
For life comes not, will never come again.
This was, is now, must be a blighted land
Till changed, till bless'd by an Almighty hand.

XI.

Methinks I see, in waking dream,
The voyagers upon that stream,
In future ages, thro' all time,
As pilgrims hail this wondrous clime.
Ascending there, on many a morn,
Far generations, yet unborn,
Will view with awe each sterile height,
From beam of dawn to starry night.
And trusting youth, which knows no fears,
With gladdened eye, undimm'd by tears,
May breathe soft vows, their songs of praise,
With sunny hope of early days.
But they will pass, are passing now,
With woe-worn heart and furrowed brow,

The shattered ruins, left behind,
Of joys they sought, but could not find.
New generations will succeed,
With change of time, of name and creed.
Strange populations there may meet,
And, 'mid those scenes, each other greet.
There may be wanderers, in those times,
From the Pacific's golden climes ;
And the Atlantic's darker shores,
Where ocean's wave unceasing roars,
The curious to this land may send,
Where tribes, where nations thus may blend.
And travellers from the distant isles,
From Europe's ancient realms afar ;
Where eastern sun in splendor smiles,
Soft hour like this may calmly share.
And far beyond, proud states may rise,
Moved on by war, by enterprise ;
Till those vast regions, 'neath their hand,
May grow to great and glorious land.
O'er these dark waters fleets may ride,
And conflicts rage upon that tide.
Then this unfathomed stream will be
Highway of nations from the sea.

Some tyrant yet may build a throne,
In realms to all our race unknown ;
Or famed republics may expand,
With sacred freedom, high command,
Thro' solitudes yet unexplored,
And God and truth be there adored.

XII.

With waning light of sinking sun,
Our long, bright summer day is done.
On the horizon, far away,
The dark Laurentian mountains lay.
On glowing heights, we watch the gleam,
Of sunset's last, expiring beam ;
Where solemn glories meet the view,
And melt to twilight's deeper hue.
Our sail expands, is set once more,
Towards a smiling, distant shore.
While shadows veil the eastern skies,
O'er buoyant waves our vessel flies,
Before the rising ocean breeze,
Which sweeps those azure, inland seas.
Lone Saguenay we leave behind,
Each with a thoughtful, saddened mind.

Dim rev'ries wander back again,
In retrospection, fraught with pain.
That sullen stream, each sterile shore,
Where hope, where life, can come no more,
A gloom have cast upon the soul,
By some now felt beyond control.
The scenes long doom'd of that dread land,
And depths without a shoal, or strand,
Are all reviewed, remembered now,
And shade with deeper thought the brow.
Alas! we'll rest in grave as cold,
With many a hidden grief untold;
And lost in shades, in night more deep,
Mysterious gloom will shroud our sleep.
Like woes long past, they leave their trace,
Pale memories time can ne'er efface.
Thro' coming years, their gloom will rest
Upon the soul like dream unblest;
And there survive, till some are old,
And weary hearts are worn and cold.
Remembrance lingering o'er the past,
With graver thoughts will be o'ercast,
And blend their hues with some deep woe,
Which darkens half our life below.

The stately bark glides on her way,
Once more adieu, dark Saguenay.

Montreal, 1st September, 1860.